

VIDEO by James Minton

HALLOCK'S VIDEOOLA

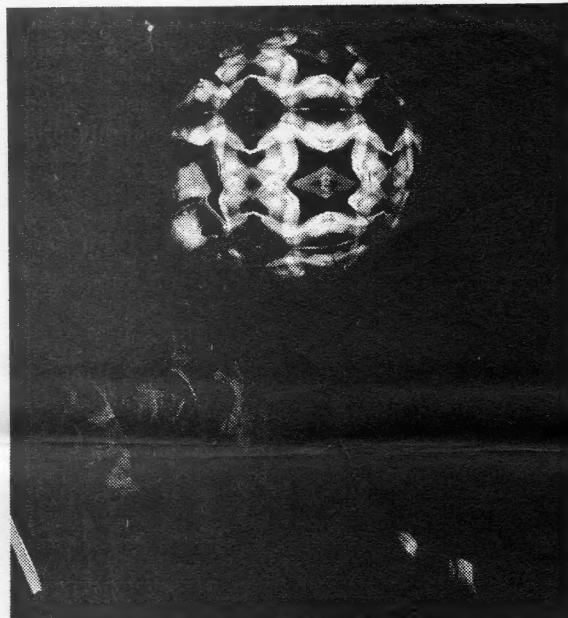
Don Hallock's Videola, now on display at the San Francisco Museum of Art, is an ordinary color television monitor located at the end of a tunnel or truncated cone of mirrors. Images displayed on the face of the monitor are collected, reflected, multiplied and warped until an illusory sphere is generated, a luminous globe floating in space, its surface animated by Hallock's bright videotaped forms and colors, shifting, turning, mutating and permutating in those linear yet simultaneously organic rhythms unique to electronic painting.

An informational handout provided by the Museum correctly points out that a major limitation faced by video artists such as Hallock is the severely restricted size and shape of their compositional surface, i.e. that of the common television screen. Only a few of Hallock's colleagues have even addressed themselves to this problem. Some have attempted to solve it with multi-monitor displays, others by the use of the video projector (a device that optically magnifies the monitor image and throws it onto a wall or screen as if it were a film). The first device generally fails because a bank of individual monitors tends to remain a bank of individual monitors, regardless of how closely related their separate displays are (in a similar manner, a wall covered with individual paintings tends to remain a wall covered with individual paintings, regardless of how closely-related their separate surfaces are). The projected video image overcomes this difficulty, but only by substituting several of its own — the most crippling being loss of that unique depth characteristic of video, and due to the fact that a monitor image is light emanating from, or light through; whereas the projected image is (again, like film) merely light reflected.

Hallock's Videola manages to expand the video surface as does the video projector, without sacrificing the depth of a regular monitor display. It does not actually, however, alter the compositional surface available to the video artist. The Videola is a mechanism of mirrors: it merely repeats the rectangle of the monitor screen, replicating it twice and twice and twice again until an apparent spherical polyhedron is formed. Hallock is not composing for a sphere or any three-dimensional surface; he is composing for a rectangle subject to illusory multiplication and distortion into a planar spheroid. The incidents, events, shape and color changes occur not across the surface of a large globe, but across the surface of a relatively small rectangle which is, in fact, the matrix from which that larger surface is generated.

Even though Hallock's Videola does not properly solve video's scale and format problem it represents a singularly important achievement. To begin, it opens the videospace that unique and luminous recession, in a way and to an extent no other electronic painter has even approached, much less matched. The Videola's polyhedron seems to exist in a vast and empty space outside of ours, tangent to ours along the surface of a single face, that of the actual monitor screen; it hangs in this viewable yet impenetrable

universe static and serene in its wholeness, furiously alive and shifting in its individual parts. A continuous tension is generated between stasis and flux, then dissipated, then regenerated. The result: a rigorous and casual fascination comparable only to recorded views of the whole Earth, turning past the camera



"VIDEOOLA," at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

lenses of orbiting spacecraft while the whole world's weather turns locally and in separate time.

Beyond this Hallock, with his Videola, has effected a slightly remarkable reversal of art's idiot-brother relationship with Technology (note the big T). Since artists began hanging out with engineers (and bragging about it) in the middle 1960s, inanity after inanity has been perpetrated in the name of Art & Technology. All but a thimbleful of these "collaborations" have been characterized by the use of sophisticated technical means for the production of simple-minded art. Hallock inverts this equation. Using simple means (mirrors plus basic carpentry), he gestures quite vigorously at effects and manifestations beyond current technology. In Samuel Delany's novel NOVA, the hero plays a musical instrument that generates and projects forms of light the way an electric guitar generates and projects forms of sound. These forms exist in real, visual space, are total creations of the musician and are subject to his absolute control. They are described as luminous and hypnotic, antic, glowing shapes of imagination made immediately visible, as manifest to the eye as cast bronze is to the hand, yet as malleable as sound is to a guitarist of our world. Hallock's Videola strains to become Delany's "video guitar;" both he and it are several steps ahead of the electronics industry. Waiting impatiently.